

# Cyprus

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## Freedom of the Press

Freedom of speech and expression are guaranteed under Article 19 of the constitution. These rights are generally respected on the internationally recognized Greek part of Cyprus, known as the Republic of Cyprus, where the independent press is vibrant and frequently criticizes authorities. The 1989 Press Law supports freedom of the press through guaranteeing the circulation of newspapers, the right to not reveal sources, and access to official information. Libel and defamation are civil offenses. In April, former president Demetris Christofias sued the state broadcaster, the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CyBC), and its head of news, Yiannis Kareklas, for libel over disparaging remarks made in February against Christofias by Nikos Anastasiades, who became the nation's president in later in February. Anastasiades soon retracted those statements.

Cyprus does not have a freedom of information (FOI) law, but in early 2013 a draft law, written by the University of Nicosia Law Clinic, was circulated among advocates. As of the end of 2013, Cyprus and Spain were the only countries in the European Union (EU) not to have FOI laws. Because there is not a formal press council, journalists use self-regulation to address complaints or professional lapses.

In 2013, the worsening economic situation and increasingly heated political climate in the Republic of Cyprus appeared to contribute to an uptick in censorship and self-censorship regarding politically controversial content. In March, the Republic of Cyprus accepted a highly controversial economic bailout from the EU and the International Monetary Fund. In return for €10 billion (\$13 billion) in emergency loans, Cyprus agreed to close its second-largest bank and use uninsured deposits over €100,000 to pay for poorly performing investments. Though these developments were very unpopular with much of the population, the response of major media outlets was generally muted.

In February, the Radio-Television Authority blocked the broadcast of an advertisement by the Pancyriot Citizens' Movement, which depicted the dire consequences that agreeing to the bailout would have for Cyprus. According to the authority, the advertisement represented events that had not yet occurred and was a veiled campaign ad targeting a particular candidate in the upcoming elections. In April, Sigma TV, one of the country's largest private television stations, censored a broadcast of a comedy program hosted by Greek comedian Lakis Lazopoulos that was rebroadcast from Greece. Specifically, a portion of the broadcast where Lazopoulos made references to the country's newly elected president, Anastasiades, was cut without warning. On New Year's Eve, CyBC, in lieu of airing Anastasiades's New Year's message to the nation, instead aired the address of former president Christofias from 2009. It is unclear whether a technical error was to blame or if there were political reasons behind the erroneous broadcast. Reports of physical attacks or harassment of journalists in the Republic of Cyprus are rare.

Press freedom is guaranteed by law in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is recognized only by Turkey. However, authorities are generally hostile to the independent press, and journalists can be arrested, tried, and sentenced under the "unjust actions" section of the criminal code. The government of Northern Cyprus has frequently targeted independent newspapers and journalists who choose to cover controversial issues, though there was a decline in such incidents in 2013. Media in Northern Cyprus can also display certain societal biases. A hostile attitude toward subjects such as same-sex sexual activity, which is banned under Section 171 of the penal code, persists in the territory. In January 2012, the Turkish Cypriot newspaper *Kıbrıs* revealed the identities of two men arrested under Section 171, in a report that

also allegedly included derogatory comment about the men in question.

Cypriots have access to Greek and Turkish broadcasts throughout the island. There are 7 daily newspapers and 31 weeklies. Broadcast ownership consists of a mix between state and private operators, some of which rebroadcast television or radio stations from Greece. The CyBC, a state-funded broadcasting organization, is the main broadcaster in the Greek part of Cyprus, operating three television channels and four radio stations. There are several daily newspapers, many of which are closely linked to political parties; several monthly and other occasional publications also operate. The internet was accessed by more than 65 percent of the population in 2013, and the medium is not subject to any known government restrictions. Following the switch-off of analogue television transmission in 2011 and a requirement that all television stations broadcast nationally with a digital signal, several local television stations have shut down, unable to afford the cost of nationwide transmission.

The Turkish-controlled zone has its own press and broadcasters, and news outlets in general mirror the island's political division. In Northern Cyprus, there are several daily newspapers available, although mainland Turkish papers are generally preferred. The government-operated broadcaster in Northern Cyprus is Bayrak Radio-TV, which operates two television channels—BRT 1 and BRT 2—as well as four radio stations. Several private television and radio stations also broadcast in Northern Cyprus, many of which rebroadcast programming from Turkey.

*[Although the narrative covers both Greek and Turkish Cyprus, the numerical rating for Cyprus is based on conditions on the Greek side of the island only.]*

## **2014 Scores**

### **Press Status**

Free

### **Press Freedom Score**

**(0 = best, 100 = worst)**

25

### **Legal Environment**

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

5

### **Political Environment**

**(0 = best, 40 = worst)**

11

### **Economic Environment**

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**